



REPORT

VOLUME 6 NO. 4 SPRING 1994

The Barney Hoax

by Miriam Blake

A friend recently told me that she had seen on the evening news that Barney conveys Satanic messages. "Who's Barney?" I asked. Only then was I introduced to the six-foot-four-inch purple dinosaur star of a children's public TV program. I just shook my head and smiled.

Barney, it turns out, was the innocent victim of John M. Bunch, Jr. and David J. Bennett, two graduate psychology students at the University of South Florida, Tampa, and partners in a comedy act called "The Human Kennel." Seeking publicity for their act, Bunch decided to see how gullible the media are. The challenge was to think of the most idiotic cause with which he could be associated. He selected what he considered "the most innocuous, inane thing ever" — Barney.

Inspired by comedian Don Novello's 1977 book, *The Lazlo Letters* (containing numerous ridiculous letters written by Novello under the pseudonym "Lazlo Toth," and the inappropriately serious replies that they generated), Bunch created a fictitious born-again Christian character named "Luscious M. Bromley," the purported founder of a group called Citizens Concerned About Barney. Without even including his telephone number, Bunch mailed letters to the Tampa Bay TV stations and newspapers, complaining that Barney, by being a dinosaur, was teaching "the most dangerous lesson" — that the world existed millions of years ago. "If one truly believes in the Bible, the world is six thousand years old, period!"

The story was first humorously reported by WFLA Channel 8. The next day a story ran in the *Tampa Tribune*, and the *St. Petersburg Times* and the other TV stations then jumped aboard the bandwagon. Soon the story was picked up by the Associated Press and CNN.

In his *Tribune* interview with Michelle Bearden, "Bromley" said that the group focused its attention on Barney because "he's the most pervasive entity of a humanist scientific world view that has infiltrated society. He started this whole dinosaur craze that kids have embarked on. What we're seeing is the promotion of the evolution theory, and putting in the minds of children that the Bible is not necessary to explain the origin of man."

In Bill Duryea's *St. Petersburg Times* article, "Bromley," speaking of the young Barney viewers, charged that Barney's sugar-coated message covers up a

deeper meaning. "When they get older, they will not have the moral integrity to withstand drugs, gang-related activities, abortion, homosexuality, premarital sex and so forth." "Bromley" added that it was secular humanism that had led to his own past "problems with drugs, pornography and womanizing."

The Tampa Bay chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists decided to devote its February 23 meeting to the Barney hoax. The guest panel consisted largely of "hoaxed" reporters, Bunch/"Bromley," and our own TBS founder Gary Posner.

Bunch told the gathering that he had expected, at most, a form-letter reply to his letter. But Channel 8 contacted him and asked for an appointment. "It was a great chance for my partner Dave to become involved and make this a comedy." So they went to a thrift store and purchased a couple of tacky-looking suits, did the interview, and went on the air. "I didn't expect it to actually run," said Bunch. "We had worked in the Tampa Bay area for a couple of years doing our comedy act and I thought a Channel 8 editor or a technician would see the tape and recognize us as 'The Human Kennel.'" But the segment aired at 5:30 and 11:00 p.m., and again the next morning. Still nobody recognized them.

"We were waiting for the ball to drop, but it didn't," said Bunch. It became clear that they had a good shot at a full-fledged media hoax. "So I typed a couple of press releases and faxed them to the other TV stations and newspapers, re-stating our basic beliefs about Barney and asking them to do a story." The media complied.

By the time Bearden interviewed him, "Bromley" had adopted a southern drawl which changed with every radio and TV interview, though no one seemed to notice. "Michelle really questioned me," explained Bunch. "I was having to come up with things off the top of my head." She asked his age and occupation (he decided to be a house painter, and his partner a plumber), and wanted to talk to someone else in the group. "I gave her Dave's name, and then I had to put her off for a few days because there wasn't anybody else [in the group]. I got a friend to say he was a member and Michelle talked to him. She was the only one who investigated the story." But they were eventually interviewed by all three network-affiliated TV stations in Tampa Bay and, according to Bunch, the story was carried in at least twenty major markets nationally.

Bearden felt particularly victimized by the hoax because, although an experienced religion writer, this had

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TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS Statement of Purpose and "\$1,000 Challenge"

Tampa Bay Skeptics, Inc. is a non-profit educational and scientific organization devoted to the critical examination of paranormal and fringe-science claims, and the dissemination of factual information about such claims to interested parties throughout the Tampa Bay area and environs. TBS does not reject claims on a *a priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective and critical inquiry. We share the philosophy of the international Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), though TBS is an autonomous local group and is not formally affiliated with CSICOP.

TBS's "\$1,000 Challenge" is open to anyone claiming verifiable scientific proof of the reality of ESP, UFOs, dowsing, astrology, or any paranormal phenomenon. Please contact us for complete details.

TBS Report is published quarterly. We welcome news clippings, and articles and letters for publication (subject to editing for length, clarity, and taste), including opposing points of view. As our budget is very limited, stamped, self-addressed return envelopes would be appreciated with all correspondence.

Views expressed in articles and letters are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Tampa Bay Skeptics.

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CHAIRMAN'S

ORDER

"Hidden Memories": False and True

by Terry A. Smiljanich

In July 1983, Judy Johnson of Manhattan Beach complained to police that her son had been molested by a teacher at the McMartin Preschool several times over a three-month period. Psychotherapists descended upon the community, and before long, several "memories" of abuse had been elicited from impressionable children. Several years and several million dollars later, criminal prosecutions failed to obtain a conviction, but many reputations were left in tatters. Ms. Johnson, by the way, was later hospitalized with a diagnosis of acute paranoid schizophrenia.

Some psychotherapists, however, haven't looked back. We are daily inundated with stories of celebrities filling us in on their history of child abuse or telling us about their past lives in Byzantine Europe, discovered under the watchful guidance of their therapists. Meanwhile, at America's intellectual capital, Harvard psychiatrist John Mack treats patients who have been abducted by extraterrestrials and subjected to intergalactic sexual experiments: "A huge, strange interspecies or interbeing breeding program has invaded our physical reality and is affecting the lives of hundreds of thousands, if not millions" (*New York Times Magazine*, March 20, 1994). For more pearls of wisdom from this Harvard maven, watch for his forthcoming book, *Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens* (Scribners).

What all of these incidents have in common is a renewed reliance on hypnosis and regression therapy as a valid therapeutic tool. For a fee, a hypnotherapist will put you in touch with your past lives or, if you prefer, will validate your dreams of Martian surgery. Regressed back to your childhood, you'll suddenly "remember" the sexual abuse and Satanic rituals your parents put you through.

This sad state of affairs leaves us with a profession being slowly invaded by terminal nonsense. As incredible as it sounds, some psychotherapists have taken to treating delusions by entering into those delusions themselves. In doing so, they ignore the last 100 years of developments in the science of psychology. A recent book by Dr. Robert A. Baker, *Hidden Memories: Voices and Visions From Within* (Prometheus Books, 1992), explores this entire subject, bringing together the results of years of serious examination of hypnosis. Test after test of hypnosis has demonstrated conclusively that there is no such thing as a "hypnotic trance." People who are hypnotized have simply accepted the hypnotist as therapist and trust him or her explicitly. It is the *hypnotist*, not the patient, who has primary influence on the content of any extracted "memories."

Combined with this is the fact that we all carry around *real* memories, recent and old, of which we are not even consciously aware, a state that Baker refers to as "cryptomnesia." These hidden memories, when unexpectedly recalled, are the source of déjà vu, repression, forgotten time, and other anomalies of human memory. When the mind conjures up such long-forgotten memories, it struggles to tie bits and pieces together with storylines that are often the result of confabulation (substituting fantasy for inadequate factual information). Throw in a gullible psychologist looking to validate his or her pet theory of alien abduction, rampant child abuse, or reincarnation, and you have a bestseller in the making. Partial memories are "enhanced" by the fantasy of the patient, the therapist, or both.

Unlike some of the silliness that we seem surrounded by, this pseudo-psychology can do active harm. In *UFO Abductions: A Dangerous Game* (Prometheus, 1989), Philip J. Klass forcefully describes this problem as it relates to alien abductions. Now, others victimized by false accusations of child abuse are beginning to fight back. Undoubtedly, some cases of remembered abuse are legitimate, but the wheat is difficult to separate from the chaff due to the unprincipled approach of some therapists. I recently received a letter from a "falsely accused parent" applauding our work at TBS and advising me of an organization called the False Memory Syndrome Foundation (3401 Market St., Suite 130, Philadelphia, PA 19104). In California, a father accused by his daughter

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Former St. Petersburg police chief to become MUFON investigator

Curt Curtsinger, fired as St. Petersburg's police chief in 1992 for alleged "racial insensitivity" and now running for a Florida House seat, has become a member of the Mutual UFO Network and has applied for status as an official MUFON field investigator. Last year, Curtsinger was narrowly defeated in the St. Petersburg mayoral race.

According to press accounts, Curtsinger took a 100-question certification exam in order to become MUFON's chief investigator of UFO reports for Pinellas, Hillsborough and Manatee counties, which already have 12 other investigators. MUFON, the country's largest pro-UFO organization, claims about 5,000 members worldwide, and about 80 in the three-county area.

Headed by Walter Andrus and based in Seguin, Texas, MUFON is one of the few UFO organizations that has not declared the Ed Walters / Gulf Breeze photographs to be a hoax. Andrus has relieved several Florida MUFON members of their official duties for having come to the "hoax" conclusion as a result of their own investigations.

"Chi Kung has made her a believer"

The above was the headline of a January 24 front-page article by *St. Petersburg Times* medical writer Carol Gentry. The article was subtitled, "Chinese exercises helped her neck injury after doctors couldn't. Insurance covered it. But Master Lee says he doesn't treat people: 'I help people help themselves.'"

Chi Kung (spelled Qigong in a Summer 1978 *Skeptical Inquirer* exposé) is an ancient Chinese "healing" technique in which the "master," without touching the patient, allegedly effects a cure by gesturing toward the patient with gyrating arms and unleashing healing energy. The patient generally exhibits spontaneous body movements as the healing energy works its wonders.

According to the *Times* article, Tampa Bay's Master Lee relieved a local woman of neck pain resulting from a motor vehicle accident. X-rays and an MRI scan of the neck were apparently negative, and the patient's neurologist had been unable to relieve her pain with medication. The pain had also been resistant to standard physical therapy, chiropractic adjustments and acupuncture. According to the article, "After her first session, she [the patient] said, she felt the 'blockage' in her neck begin to break up. She sensed the blood flow to her brain was improved." But post-traumatic neck pain is not the result of a blockage of blood to the brain. In fact, "brain" tissue does not even possess pain receptors (even the most

paralyzing strokes due to the massive blockage of a brain artery are painless).

The patient ultimately underwent five treatments, at a total cost of \$200, and apparently thereafter no longer suffered from her neck pain. The purpose of writing the article, Gentry told me in a telephone conversation, was the fact that after submitting paperwork to her insurer, the patient was reimbursed by Nationwide Insurance for her costs, a first for this sort of unconventional therapy.

What most disturbed me about the article was its discussion of a local woman with "pre-cancerous growths in her throat" who is becoming a "grudging believer" in Chi Kung. Fortunately, she considers herself enough of a "doubting Thomas type" that she "still plans to have [her planned] surgery." During my telephone conversation with Gentry (initiated by her regarding another matter), she told me that she is as skeptical of Chi Kung as I am. I told her (as I did in my published Letter to the Editor) that her readers would have no way of knowing that from the positive portrayal in her article.

My letter pointed out that in 1988, a delegation from CSICOP traveled to China and later published its negative findings in the *Skeptical Inquirer* and on a videotape. Under controlled conditions, the "patient" failed to move when the Chi Kung master gyrated, while at other times when the master rested the patient reacted wildly. My letter, which alluded to beliefs of patients suffering from psychosomatic ailments, prompted a single letter mailed to me in response. Written by a rabid (and perhaps schizophrenic) adherent of Christian Science, the envelope was addressed to "The lying, criminally insane, s---headed jacka-- a--hole lunatic, con artist 'Dr.' Gary Posner." Apparently the appellation is accurate enough, as the letter was delivered to me in a timely manner.

—Gary Posner

Colorado Board of Nursing's response to "Therapeutic Touch" controversy

Therapeutic Touch (TT), a "hands-off" technique akin to Chi Kung, has been scandalizing the Colorado Board of Nursing, which had approved courses in TT for nurses' Continuing Education requirements. I recently received a letter from the Board: "At its January 27-28 meeting, the Colorado Board of Nursing considered your [critical] letter. . . . At a rule-making hearing . . . the Board repealed the continuing education requirement. . . ." The Rocky Mountain Skeptics (leading the charge), myself and others had requested that the Board simply eliminate its endorsement of TT, *not* the requirement that nurses must take Continuing Education courses to maintain licensure. Talk about throwing out the baby with the bath water!

—G.P.

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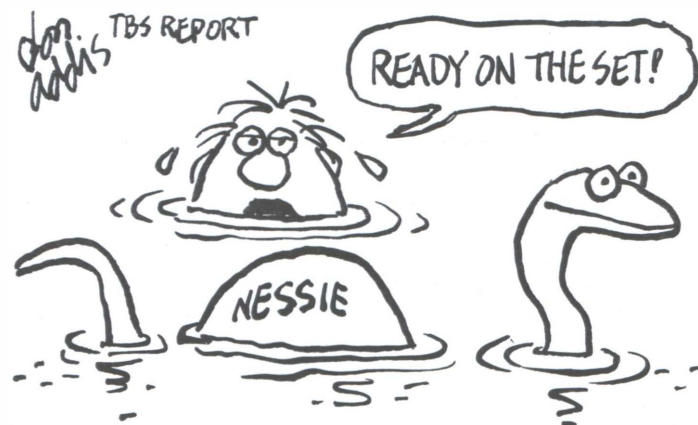
SNIPPETS

As Yogi Berra may have once observed, it's déjà vu all over again! In a January 25 press announcement, alleged "psychic" Uri Geller claimed to have made London's Big Ben stand still for three hours two days earlier. "... I said to myself, 'Stop,' while concentrating on the clock. ..." Engineers say the stoppage occurred because of a tight bearing. In December 1989, Geller had made a similar claim, which authorities attributed instead to another simple mechanical problem. Now if Geller were to make Big Ben's hands bend ...

(*Baltimore Sun*, January 26)

The most famous photograph ever taken of the Loch Ness "monster," showing what appears to be a long-necked serpent, is apparently a fake. According to a report in the March 13 edition of London's *Sunday Telegraph*, the hoax was acknowledged in a death-bed confession at age 90 of the last survivor of three co-conspirators. Christian Spurling, a skilled model-maker, said he built the one-foot-high and 18-inch-long "monster" and affixed it to a toy submarine. The hoax was reportedly hatched by Spurling's stepfather Marmaduke Wetherell, a filmmaker and "self-styled big game hunter hired by the [London] *Daily Mail* in 1933 to hunt Nessie." The photo was snapped by his friend Robert Wilson, "an eminent London gynecologist."

(AP via *St. Pete. Times*, March 16)



New Mexico Congressman Steven Schiff has nudged the General Accounting Office to investigate the claim that an ET spaceship crashed in New Mexico in 1947. Schiff, a member of the House Government Operations Committee, had earlier complained about the Defense Department's "unresponsiveness" to his inquiries. The claims of a crashed saucer and the recovery of alien bodies has created a raging controversy and rift within the pro-UFO movement, and has been the subject of several recent books. Skeptic Phil Klass has explained the "UFO" as an early experimental balloon-borne radar reflector.

(*Washington Post* via *St. Pete. Times*, Jan. 26)

From Don Addis' January 30 *St. Petersburg Times* column: "Scientists tell us a comet will collide with Jupiter in July of this year. Well, there goes *their* dinosaur population."

Triad Research of Springfield, Missouri, held its national conference on UFOs earlier this year in Clearwater. One of the speakers was Harvard psychiatry professor John Mack, winner of a Pulitzer Prize in 1977 for his biography of Lawrence of Arabia. More recently, Mack has become one of the nation's chief UFO abduction gurus, claiming that hundreds

of thousands, and perhaps millions, of Americans have been abducted by alien beings. Among other Triad attendees were members of support groups for "experiencers" who have difficulty facing skepticism of their oft-hypnosis-induced stories (see this issue's "Chairman's Corner" for related discussion). Michael Fay's uncritical front-page article also prominently publicized the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) and its local chapter.

(*Tampa Tribune*, Feb. 18)



In a new book called *The Five Gospels* (the original four plus the Gospel of Thomas, discovered in 1945), 78 Bible scholars comprising the "Jesus Seminar" present their consensus as to how much of the purported word of Jesus was really his, and how much was a later invention by the early organizers of the Christian religion. Their conclusion: less than 20% is legitimate. Among the biblical passages probably incorrectly attributed to Jesus is the one declaring that the only way to heaven is to accept Jesus as savior: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me." In fact, as reported by the *St. Pete. Times* religion editor, "The result is a portrait of a Jesus who generally doesn't initiate dialogue or debate, doesn't offer to cure people, rarely speaks about himself in the first person and makes no claim to be the messiah. ... The gospel writers were not only disciples of Jesus, the scholars suggest, but skilled fiction writers who embellished Jesus' words with borrowed lore, passages from Greek scripture and other sources to fit the times and persuade their audiences that Jesus indeed was the long-awaited messiah."

(*St. Pete. Times*, Jan. 29)

["Snippets" are derived and rewritten from the referenced sources. Please send your clippings to the editor.]

"The Barney Hoax" (continued from page 1)

been her first story for the *Tribune*. As she related at the meeting, "I was supposed to be able to ferret out the weirdos because of my vast knowledge of religion. However, Bunch had all the rhetoric — he used key phrases." She said that to be fair she felt she had to listen to him. "He told me he had led a sinful life of drugs and alcohol and had joined a 12-step program. I wrote the story and sat on it for three days." When the story broke on Ch. 8, she felt that she couldn't "sit" on it any longer, although she wishes she had since, she said, Bunch had simply wasted many hours of her valuable time by lying.

Bearden's editor had checked the phone number that Bunch had given her, and found it to be listed under the names "John and K. Bunch." Said Bearden, "When I asked about the telephone listing, he told me it is difficult to get a phone after being in trouble, that it was his brother-in-law John Bunch who had paid the telephone deposit. He didn't hesitate; he was very smooth. At 5 p.m. that day we decided that we would be prejudicial if we did not run the story."

Duryea explained how, when he tried unsuccessfully to track down "Bromley" through the telephone directory and drivers license records, "red flags" went up. "My editor told me to call the Associated Press for his phone number." They gave it to him only reluctantly, telling him that they had been given it by Michelle Bearden and that it wasn't supposed to be made known. "I talked to Reverend Joe Chambers in North Carolina. I found out that 'Bromley' had received Chambers' leaflet *The Purple Messiah*, which claims that Barney is replacing God and family as dominant influences for children." Another "red flag" went up. "I finally reached 'Bromley' and we decided to run the story. It was a great hoax because it was not that far from reality. 'Bromley' just pushed it a little further."

Bunch said that the day the *Tribune* came out with the story, the Florida Associated Press put it on the broadcast wire. "We started getting calls from all over Florida. Michelle gave them my telephone number" (he had asked her to give out his post office box number only). Bunch said that Bearden offered some advice: "Listen, if you are going to start a national campaign you'd better get your own phone line." So Bunch got a second line. "The calls started coming in so fast, we couldn't answer them on one phone line. I'm an inexperienced hoaxer and it was part of the learning process." Bearden added that she had given Bunch's co-hoaxer Dave Bennett some advice as well. Supposedly in charge of his group's media relations, Bennett was the worst such officer that Bearden had ever dealt with, and she advised him to be more professional.

How was the hoax exposed? Susan Lavery, assistant news director at WUSF-FM, deadpanned that she learned of the hoax by using her twenty years of investigative journalistic skills — somebody recognized Bunch and Bennett and tipped her off. In an interview, Christine Beyer, Director of Corporate Communications for WEDU Channel 3 (which broadcasts the Barney program locally), told Michelle Bearden that the Barney show is about "goodness and love." However, after a complaint about

subliminal Satanic messages last year, the FBI and the Motion Picture Association examined the Barney show frame by frame. They gave it a clean bill of health.

When Posner spoke, he pointed out that the local media had been hoaxed before in much more serious ways, without provoking the sort of self-flagellation evidenced among the reporters at the meeting. He cited the Tarpon Springs "Weeping Icon" hoax involving a photograph of Mary with white dots (but no tears) beneath her eyes, perpetrated by a priest who was later transferred out of the area [see *TBS Report*, Fall 1989 and *Skeptical Inquirer*, Summer 1990]. And he pointed out that Kathy Fountain had devoted two of her TV shows to Ed Walters and his Gulf Breeze UFO photographs, even thanking Walters for his "honesty" in coming forward. Later a model UFO was found in the attic of his former home.

The panelists asked themselves, and the audience, how they could avoid being similarly fooled in the future. Bunch noted that he did not invent the media hoax concept, and cautioned that there would be plenty more. "The way the media operates, it is ripe for hoaxes." Posner, availing himself of the evening's last word, brought the house down when he offered a solution from his unique perspective: "Hire an in-house psychic in your news departments to tip you off." Now *that* was the consummate hoax!

Editor's note: Following the meeting, Andrea Brunais interviewed me for her February 28 *Tampa Tribune* column about the Barney hoax. I pointed out that in contrast to this "humorous" incident, reporters might more appropriately concern themselves with their uncritical coverage of such claims as Chi Kung (see page 3 item). I added that journalists shouldn't feel too badly about being hoaxed once in a while, since even supposedly skeptical scientists and law enforcement officers have been known to fall for psychics' claims. We need to keep in mind that we are all capable of being fooled.

Unlike myself, Thomas J. Billitteri, religion editor for the *St. Petersburg Times*, failed to find humor in the Barney prank. Although not present at the SPJ meeting, Billitteri clearly stated his feelings in his February 19 column, "Barney hoax is no joke." Excerpts: "[W]hat a sad commentary on our culture when religious bashing and thinly veiled hate can be viewed by two grown men as 'funny.' . . . every bit as offensive as racial, ethnic or gender stereotyping. . . . [M]aking a laughingstock of . . . fundamentalists . . . is repugnant."

He added, "My point is this: I don't like pranks that make one religion or another buffoonish or dangerous." Yet it was Billitteri who just three weeks earlier, in his column about a new book reporting on the research of 78 Bible scholars (see "Snippets"), informed his readers of the consensus view that Christianity was the invention of "skilled fiction writers." I pointed out at the SPJ meeting that fundamentalist Christians (at least a few with whom I work) found that column infinitely more offensive than they did the Barney hoax. And, interestingly, when I asked for a show of hands, no one in the audience expressed agreement with Billitteri's harsh characterization of the now-infamous purple dinosaur caper.

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1994 CSICOP Conference

This year's CSICOP conference will be held in Seattle, Washington, on June 23-26. The theme will be "The Psychology of Belief."

Topics to be discussed: "Alien Abductions," "The Belief Engine: How World Views Are Formed"; "An Illustrated History of UFOs"; "How We Fool Ourselves: Anomalies of Perception and Interpretation"; "Memory: How Reliable Is It?"; "Conspiracy Theories"; "Near-Death Experiences"; and "Influencing Beliefs in the Courtroom: Rules of Law, Expert Testimony, and Science."

Carl Sagan will deliver the Keynote Address, and there will be optional CSICOP Luncheons and an Awards Banquet.

For additional information, please contact CSICOP, or send a stamped return envelope to TBS.

First Annual Tampa UFO Conference

On May 20-22, the first annual "Tampa UFO Conference" will be held at the Holiday Inn - Tampa International Airport.

Titled "UFOs and New Frontiers: Connecting With the Larger Reality," this conference (which is *not* endorsed by TBS) will feature "8 intriguing lectures and 7 mind-expanding workshops." The line-up includes Dr. Raymond Mooney (author of *Life After Life*), Budd Hopkins (*Intruders*) and Stanton Friedman (*Crash at Corona*).

For further information you are invited to call (904) 432-8888.

National Council Against Health Fraud

We also wish to make our readers aware of the existence and mission of the National Council Against Health Fraud. NCAHF is

a non-profit, voluntary consumer protection agency that focuses its attention upon health fraud, misinformation and quackery as public health problems. It has a large body of information on paranormal health claims, and publishes a bi-monthly newsletter. Address: P.O. Box 1276, Loma Linda, CA 92354.

Library Journal praises Skeptic magazine

Library Journal, which has long praised CSICOP's *Skeptical Inquirer* as "a superb primer on scientific method and hokum-detection," has now also placed its stamp of approval on *Skeptic* magazine. The California-based quarterly has been voted "one of the top 10 best new magazines of 1993," according to a Press Release just received by TBS from the Skeptics Society.

The Release also announced the recipients of the Society's annual Awards, which were bestowed by James Randi and Penn & Teller at a March 18 ceremony. Among the winners were Gerald Larue and George Jammal for their Noah's Ark hoax of CBS and Sun Pictures, and Howard Rosenberg of the *Los Angeles Times* for challenging CBS to be more responsible with what it airs.

"Chair's Corner" (from page 2)

of childhood sexual abuse has sued her two therapists for damages caused by the loss of his job as a result of what he calls their "con job." One can only hope that this trend will grow larger.

Psychiatrists such as John Mack are medical doctors. Psychologists and other therapists who employ regressive hypnosis are not. But even they would be well advised to heed the first commandment of the Hippocratic oath: "First, do no harm to the patient."

Other skeptical sources on the paranormal:

• Prometheus Books •

50-page catalogue
59 John Glenn Dr. / Buffalo, NY 14228

• Skeptical Inquirer •

Flagship journal of
CSICOP / Box 703 / Buffalo, NY 14226

• Skeptic •

Published by the Skeptics Society
2761 N. Marengo / Altadena, CA 91001

• Skeptics UFO Newsletter •

by Philip J. Klass
404 "N" St., S.W. / Wash., DC 20024

LETTERS • READERS' FORUM

Editor: Since our Fall meeting with the former MUFON representative, I have been thinking more about our job as skeptics, what we are doing, and perhaps how we should go about doing it a little better.

It seems to me that if we wish to investigate "abnormal" events, we have to somehow get to the events themselves. The way it seems to be now, at least when it comes to UFOs, we concern ourselves with reports of the reports of the alleged event. Someone claims to have seen something, they report it to someone else, an investigator makes an inquiry and issues a report, someone writes up that report, and then we try to come to terms with that version of the event. It seems to me that such is an exercise in futility. At best, we can only evaluate the report, not come to any decision regarding the alleged event itself.

Also, the investigator usually has his or her own agenda and rarely asks the questions *we* would ask, especially follow-up questions. He may not even be aware of the avenues of inquiry that might be most productive from our (scientific) point of view.

We can deal with a report until we're blue in the face and yet solve nothing as far as the truth of the event is concerned. Creative reporting can lend an element of truth to an imagined event, while poor reporting can cast doubt on an actual event.

Some of our members need to be willing and able to go to the scene of an event as soon after the report as possible with a formal, well thought-out list of items to be resolved. They need to be trained in interviewing (especially in neuro-linguistics), and need to take with them the items which may be needed in order to obtain and record any objective information.

I don't quite know how we can accomplish all this, but it seems as if we need to do something along these lines if we are ever going to do more than trade subjective views with whoever attracts our attention with an unusual claim. I'd be willing to assist if we decide to study such an approach.

Tom Leckrone, New Port Richey

Members who wish to assist in the formation of a TBS "rapid response team" are encouraged to contact Tom at 11421 Wild Cat Lane, New Port Richey, FL 34654, or to call him at 856-9306. I for one am available for such activities, as my work schedule permits. —G.P.

Editor: Although not a member of TBS, I attended your Fall meeting at the Clearwater East Library and would like to comment on that meeting.

Though I am interested as a skeptic in metaphysical and extraterrestrial phenomena, I must be honest and tell you that your meeting was an absolute bore!

In the first instance, your guest speaker spoke at length beyond a reasonable period of time. Once beyond 20 minutes, the audience begins to get antsy. A period of questions and answers should follow, then go on to another area or subject.

The entire two hours I spent there was conducive to a "slumber atmosphere" because of the constant droning and repetitive talk. The meeting lacked any stimulating interest due to an absence of vigorous and verifiable challenges. . . .

I believe that your meetings could be significantly more interesting if there was a greater competition of facts, tougher confrontation and presentation of *factual evidence* to either prove or disprove, and a more fervent counter-attack to oppose the hoaxes and fraudulent claims.

It would help to have speakers with a unique ability to convey their subject matter with flair and exuberance, which in turn would reflect on the audience to impart enthusiastic interest and participation.

I hope you will accept this as constructive analysis.

D'Anale Falcon, Clearwater

We did bend over backwards to make our pro-UFO guest speaker feel comfortable and allow him to say what he came to say to us. I agree that the talk could have been shorter and livelier, and would welcome suggestions for future guest speakers and topics for our meetings. —G.P.

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V6N4



Announcing...

Press and
Public
Welcome

Tampa Bay Skeptics Quarterly Meeting

Scheduled: Open Forum; Video from recent media coverage of the paranormal

SATURDAY, APRIL 23 --- 11:00 A.M. - 2:00 P.M.
CARMEN MANIS ROOM (2nd FLOOR)
PUBLIC LIBRARY, 900 N. ASHLEY DRIVE, TAMPA

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Posner on Noreen Renier in new "Psychic Sleuths" book

A few years ago, Joe Nickell, author of several books critically evaluating allegedly paranormal phenomena, put together a "task force" of researchers to investigate the claims of some of the world's most famous "psychic detectives." The final result, a book entitled *Psychic Sleuths: ESP and Sensational Cases*, has recently been published by Prometheus Books.

In addition to introductory and summary chapters and appendices, one entire chapter is devoted to each of the following "psychic detectives": Peter Hurkos, Gerard Croiset, Dorothy Allison, Noreen Renier, Bill Ward, Rosemarie Kerr, Phil Jordan, and Greta Alexander. The chapter on Renier, who has long resided in the Orlando area, was authored by TBS's Gary Posner, and contains much information that has not previously appeared in his *TBS Report* articles about Renier's activities.

The book's retail price (direct from Prometheus) is \$24.95 plus \$3.95 for postage and handling, and may be ordered by credit card by calling (800) 421-0351. *TBS Report* readers who wish to avail themselves of a **40% publisher's discount through TBS** should send a check for \$18.92 (\$14.97 + \$3.95) to TBS, payable to Tampa Bay Skeptics. We will mail your books to you as soon as they arrive from the publisher. You may also order any

TBS "\$1,000 Challenge"

Tampa Bay Skeptics is offering \$1,000 and a place in history to anyone able to provide TBS with verifiable scientific proof of any paranormal phenomenon. This notice represents an open invitation to any and all Florida UFOlogists, psychics, astrologers, dowsers, and the like. Please contact TBS for complete details.

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and

The CSICOP Legal Defense Foundation
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Buffalo, NY 14226

...are assisting in defending against lawsuits brought by proponents of the paranormal. Both funds hope also to be able to provide assistance to other skeptics in need. Please consider a donation.

Electro-Skeptic Bulletin Board

Join the world-wide skeptics' computer network any time via modem (up to 14,400 baud) by calling (813) 831-5706 (Tampa). TBS member Michael Kleineschay is the Sysop. For more info, page Mike during business hours at 963-9437 (Tampa) (punch in your phone # after the beeps). [Fidonet 1:377/33]

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